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AFRICAN VILLAGES AND PUBLIC SERVICES

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AFRICAN VILLAGES AND PUBLIC SERVICES

Thousands of rural villages dot the West African Sahel, a band of arid territory sandwiched between the Sahara Desert and the more humid, hospitable savannah lands to the south.¹ From one perspective these villages can be seen as so many agglomerations of human beings sharing a common interest in a large number of public problems. Some of these issues affect the entire region, others more particularly concern individual communities. All, however, relate to the phenomenon of underdevelopment, pervasive throughout the region (Cohn 1975: 428-29). These problems represent barriers to a more efficient use of resources in the area, and as such, have attracted increasing attention from political officials of the region.

A short list of these problems would unquestionably include the following three: forest conservation, pasture management, and more efficient use of fertile bottom lands. Involved as a critical element in each are land tenure questions; all three in turn relate directly and critically to the problem of desertification, that is, the spread of desert-like conditions into areas formerly or currently Sahelian in ecological type.

Despite long-standing efforts to remedy several of these problems, particularly forest conservation and pasture management, policy and performance failures are widely recognized. These failures have been starkly accentuated by the recent drought (1968-74). The Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel-CILSS—formed by a consortium of developed and underdeveloped countries (the OECD countries plus the West African Sahelian states) has undertaken to combat desertification by investment of major amounts of foreign aid during the next two decades.²

¹In the Sahel, mean annual rainfall measures 4"-12" in areas of basically pastoral economy, and 12"-24" in those commonly farmed (Opeke 1975: 21).

²The total pledged is \$20,000,000,000; whether such amounts can actually be expended in the Sahel, given existing levels of economic development, to say nothing of usefully expended, remains to be seen (Enger unpublished).

This paper presents an analysis of the theories underlying these efforts at development in the Sahel, and then examines some of the probable consequences of what appear to be existing orientations. In particular, the paper will focus on consequences of current state political orientations for village ability to participate effectively in programs designed to improve the management of renewable natural resources. Elements of public choice theory are used to clarify implications of questions raised by the analysis.

Theory of Development in the Sahel

A useful approach in identifying the theory underlying rural development efforts in francophone Sahelian states lies in specifying the main assumptions of that theory. These concern principally (1) the units of analysis; (2) the model of man; (3) nature of the development process; and (4) state's appropriate role in that process. Once these elements have been specified, the theory can be subjected to a critique from the perspective of the dominant theory of development in the area.³

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis adopted by most rural development planners in Francophone Sahelian states is most typically "the village" or "the rural community." Many programs are designed to affect such units conceived as integrated wholes (Schumacher 1975: 94, 98; Charlick unpublished: 30-36; Thomson, unpublished a: 118, 209-10; Alliot 1968: 537-44; Lampué 1968: 463-72; Thomson, unpublished b: 1-2). Others focus initially on individuals who are members of those communities, in order to effect community changes. Attempts are made to change the behavior, of individuals first, on the assumption that a demonstration or spread effect will occur and indirectly produce desired changes in village practices (Jones 1976: 268-69; Nicolas 1971: 59).

³Charlick (unpublished: 17-36) carefully analyzes several strains in the theory of rural development as applied in Niger; Schumacher (1975: 97-98) presents an outline of the French animation or rural development theory as expounded in Senegal by several French development planners shortly after independence in 1960.

Model of Man

The precise model of man adopted varies from theory to theory, but most posit an attenuated form of self-interest—rather than assuming rural residents are consistently self-interested in an individualistically-oriented sense. Peasants thus are considered capable of learning about their "class" or "village" interests, given appropriate education. Once they have been enlightened, it is assumed they will then participate in a suitable framework of representative institutions, organized by state officials with the explicit purpose of channeling local-level activity.

Implicit here is another assumption about peasant character: peasants are seen to be capable of learning—attitude change—if properly instructed. In crude terms, they are seen to be intelligent enough to be indoctrinated, but not intelligent enough to see beyond the goals of the indoctrinators, or to have or create their own goals. This is so despite doubts cast on such assumptions by data collected by social scientists working with a wide variety of groups within the region.

From the above it follows that peasants are not really capable of learning on their own. If they make mistakes, in the absence of outside assistance they can be expected to go on making mistakes because they lack the intelligence to analyze their failures and devise new, more successful approaches. A cruder version of this argument asserts peasants are largely programmed by the values of their traditional societies, and are therefore inherently conservative, suspicious of change, and extremely difficult to assist in any positive sense. This easily degenerates into racism (Fanon 1968: 41-45).

As another element in a model of peasant man, many theorists implicitly assume rural residents are generous and not terribly concerned about maximizing their own gains. Others assume the contrary: peasants are greedy, avaricious, and bent upon outstripping their fellows as fast as they possibly can. Thus one cannot speak, in connection with the general theory underlying development efforts in the Sahel, of a uniform assumption about peasants' attitudes towards maximizing strategies.

Nature of the Development Process

Nature of the development process as a category concerns the direction, degree of change, and complexity of change necessary to achieve development

- 1) only thus can waste be avoided and the maximum in efficient use of scarce resources be achieved;
- 2) only thus can development promote achievement of the right goals and avoidance of unacceptable profiteering or accumulation of political power by those groups in society who are viewed as having interests inimical to the common good; and
- 3) only if the state takes charge is there any likelihood that the process will occur at all (Charlick unpublished: 14-24; Schumacher 1975: 86ff).

This last proposition depends upon two assumptions: a great deal of social overhead capital must be created for development to be feasible (Enger unpublished); and traditional forces which prefer the status quo will mobilize resistance to development processes sufficient to frustrate them, thereby prolonging stagnation of economic, political and social systems.

Thus the state must develop and staff an efficient bureaucracy composed of subunits staffed by officials specially trained and motivated to undertake the arduous task of motivating peasants to participate in development processes (Schumacher 1975: 84-130).

It is significant, in this context, that most development planners in the francophone area do not question the potential capability of state bureaucracies to undertake such programs effectively. There is, of course, tremendous emphasis on the necessity to train officials properly for their tasks, and the assumption that lack of trained personnel is the major hurdle to be overcome within the development bureaucracy (Plantey, 1977: 17). Bureaucratic problems are recognized; corruption, inefficiency, tendencies to patron-clientelism and factionalism often head the list of difficulties, both in literature and in reports filed by development experts analyzing bureaucratic performance in Sahelian states (Schumacher 1975: passim; Plantey 1977: passim; Nicolas 1971: passim). But with rare exceptions the remedies proposed for these problems involve, directly or indirectly, strengthening the bureaucracy. There is, in sum, little questioning of the appropriateness of bureaucracy as a tool for development.

In this vein, many writers concede bureaucrats alone cannot achieve development, and therefore in the target villages it is necessary to create auxiliaries who can carry through the directives established by bureaucratic planners. To use Selznick's concept, grass roots organizations are seen as useful supplements to bureaucratic measures so long as they remain responsive to directives originating from on high (Charlick unpublished: 22-23).

Consequences for Village Participation
in Natural Resource Management Projects

Fred Hayward (1973: 594) defines political participation as "action which is directed at influencing (controlling, changing, supporting, or sharing in) policy making and/or execution in a political structure." This definition is broad enough to include action designed solely to ensure successful implementation of policy, broad enough thus to encompass the conception of popular political activity adopted by most Sahelian regimes. It in turn must be distinguished from the conception advocated by some development planners, who clearly saw power-sharing as the goal of participation-inducing policies (Charlick unpublished: 11-36; Schumacher 1975: 84-105). Sahelian regimes restrict participation to implementation, to the virtual exclusion of effective input at the policy-making stage (Thomson unpublished a; Nicolas 1971; Schumacher 1975). Even occasional programs facilitating villager input to policy making (Roberts unpublished: 14, 24-28; Thomson unpublished b) involve almost exclusively mobilized (externally-promoted) rather than autonomous (internally-motivated) participation (Huntington and Nelson 1976: 6-7).

Unit of Analysis: Implications

Consequences of assuming villagers conceive of themselves as a community and function in a unified manner become significant when reality diverges from theory. The original impetus for this assumption is, to be sure, reasonable: only if villagers act as coproducers helping to maintain and manage common property resource systems will the effort be pervasive enough to prevent environmental ruin in the Sahel. However, serious questions plague current attempts to involve villagers in such management programs.

Some villages do not function in a unified manner because they are severely factionalized or because local government lacks effective enforcement powers in relevant areas. Authors familiar with the Sahel have stressed factional tendencies within local communities which seriously weaken traditional solidarities (Faulkingham unpublished; Thomson unpublished a; Kohler 1971: 32; Ouedraogo unpublished). Migdal (1974), drawing exclusively on non-African materials, suggests village

factionalism reflects effects of extra-village forces on the local balance of power. Gerner (1976: 62-164) holds similarly that patron-client relationships linking villagers to outsiders, often through village-level intermediaries, have effectively reduced villages' capacity for autonomous political action throughout the Fourth World. This appears to be the case in many, but not all, sahelian rural communities. Particularly in Upper Volta village unity may still be a reality for some purposes (Kohler 1971: 32).

Where village unity does not exist, allocating control over various aspects of Woodstock or pasture management schemes to village communities while failing to provide requisite enforcement powers may simply guarantee inaction on environmental problems rather than promoting effective resource management. This problem can be more fully considered in conjunction with implications of the model of man adopted in the dominant theory of development in francophone sahelian states.

Model of Man: Implications

Villagers are assumed to be class-oriented, not self-interested, and not terribly capable of learning. Their orientation towards maximizing strategies is disputed.

Implicit in this model is an assumption that villagers are motivated to seek status locally by performing in ways which benefit the village as a corporate entity. This may well be true in some cases (Migdal 1974: 66-82). However, if peasants indeed act in a self-interested manner (Thomson unpublished a; Nicolas 1971: 60; Thomson unpublished b), one must define the structures which formulate incentives and distribute rewards before one can generalize about behavior patterns. It is unrealistic to assume, in the absence of supporting evidence, that community-oriented behavior will be rewarded or compelled. If it is not, probabilities of such behavior occurring are low. As Nicolas says,

The myth according to which any collection of individuals, grouped together at the initiative of the public services on technical or accounting grounds, constitutes a collectivity, nay, a community, simply doesn't correspond to the realities (1971: 60).

Especially, one might add, when such "collectivities" lack enforcement powers necessary to sustain collective action.

Yet the French tradition of municipal and rural commune organization, as applied in the Sahel, persists in seeing villages as units populated by collectively-oriented residents. For instance, Lampué summarizes the French public law viewpoint, asserting the African village:

...is the elementary territorial unit. It corresponds to a natural group, formed of several extended families whose residences are close to each other and among whom exists a feeling of solidarity arising from multiple bases, born of collective life under a common authority. This authority is exercised by the village headman, appointed in accord with custom and assisted in all important questions by the council of family heads. The village headman is the intermediary between the village community and overriding authorities.

[...villages] are inserted in the administrative structure, of which they constitute the basic cells (1968: 470).

Lampué notes also that the village headman has been given new tasks which "tend to make him a civil servant, while he also remains representative of the village group" (1968: 471).

Validity of assuming sahelian villagers in a (presumptively) collectively-oriented village setting will contribute voluntary labor to manage renewable natural resources or upgrade woodstocks or pastures depends upon answers to a number of other questions.

1) Is voluntary labor prized? For what purposes? In what institutional contexts? Voluntary, cooperative labor exchanges to produce staple foods crops (Kohler 1971: 105-37; Thomson unpublished b: 5-11; Charlick unpublished: 170-72) do not necessarily establish a basis for voluntary action in other areas.

2) What incentives exist to promote voluntary labor? In an exchange relationship, partners gain control over increased productive capacity at critical points in the agricultural cycle, which enhances the potential size of their own crops. To what extent will similar rewards provide separable benefits (Olson 1965) in new areas of voluntary activity? One suspects that inadequate capacity to equitably control allocation of meaningful benefits from voluntary resource management projects will translate into local disinterest in such projects.

These points raise issues which flow from implications of the remaining two assumptions in the dominant theory of development now practiced in the Sahel.

Nature of Development Process and

~~State's Role in Development: Implications~~

3) Do villages dispose of appropriate taxing powers which will permit them to encourage voluntary, co-production of resource management services through provision of paid organizers to control common properties and insure that each contributes his fair share to maintenance? The answer, at present, appears to be negative in any village which does not possess an effective informal government: the colonial tradition, continued by independent governments with little change in effective structure⁴ (Nicolas 1971: 49-50), manifestly seeks to dominate and demobilize village government structures.

4) To what extent are there local enforcement mechanisms capable of maintaining preferred patterns of behavior when separable benefits are non-existent or inadequate to promote effective resource management? Again, in the absence of effective clandestine regimes, there is little reason to assume villages are currently capable of upholding either local or supra-local resource management rules.

As things stand now in Niger (Crow et. al. unpublished: 51ff.) the state claims control over the Woodstock, and theoretically regulates cutting of fifteen prominent tree species through a permit system. Similar rules exist in Upper Volta. Under such restrictions, villagers may see insufficient incentives to warrant voluntary investment of time and energy in maintenance or reconstitution of local woodstocks, since fruits of their efforts will not remain under their exclusive control.

The asserted complexity of the development process and assumed necessity for a major state role therein are held to justify national

⁴Fanon (1968: 148-205) presents a bitter denunciation of government attempts to stem and then suppress participation in the post-independence era; Hayward (1973) argues persuasively that government elites in Africa, including the Sahel, are in fact opposed to participation as a potential threat to their privileges. Many other authors share this view.

control over the Woodstock. Essentially the same holds for pasturelands. No real consideration is given to the problem of enforcement, either through local means or through intervention of national government agents, even though it is widely recognized that national regulations are ignored in both countries. (Thomson 1977; Crow et. al. unpublished: 51; Raeder-Roitzsch and Zenny 1974).

Francophone Sahelian administrators and technicians see villages as "the basic cells" of the administrative apparatus. Public choice theory would suggest that, as a result, villages in pressing need of programs to stabilize local environments, particularly by introduction of appropriate balances between production and consumption of wood products and livestock forage, will face serious difficulties in achieving these goals. There is ample reason to believe large scale bureaucracies will not deal effectively or efficiently with all the problems involved, and that an alternative to the centralized conception of the state's role in the process of development is urgently needed.

Common Property Resources

Common property resources and public goods come in a variety of sizes (V. Ostrom and E. Ostrom 1977 b: 157-72). Common property resources are usually physical systems, including the two of special interest in the context of this essay: pastures and woodstocks in Sahelian regions. Environmental maintenance represents an associated public good (defined as a preferred event from enjoyment of which no one in the domain of the good can be excluded, and where consumption of the good is characterized by jointness [V. Ostrom and E. Ostrom 1977 a: 9-14]). Since production of the public good is essentially derivative of proper management of the two common property resources, insofar as it is within the power of man to manage his environment at all (Glantz 1977: 325-31),⁵ discussion here will focus initially on an alternative approach to the problems of managing common property, renewable natural resources in the Sahel.

⁵Michael H. Glantz, of the National Center for Atmospheric Research, indicates current data strongly suggest cloud seeding is a totally ineffectual weather modification procedure. Personal communication, Boulder, Colo., August 16, 1978.

These two physical systems are highly complex in structure, often involving systems within systems. The boundary problem is likewise complex. Theoretically, one could treat the entire Sahelian Woodstock and the entire Sahelian pastureland as single unified systems. However, they may also be seen in terms of the sub-global units which compose them. Each state in the Sahelian area, for instance, has a forestry service which bears responsibility, under national law, for unified management of the state's Woodstock. Within each state are a variety of smaller jurisdictions, including, typically, departments, counties, districts and villages. A variety of traditional "informal" jurisdictions associated with traditional herding groups also exist. In some situations one finds special districts, defined by development projects (Africare unpublished; Roberts unpublished) and exercising specialized powers. In others, one has development of ranching schemes by public corporations (Katz and Glantz 1977: 82-85; Hardin 1977: 118). Other de facto jurisdictions account for provision of shade within rural villages, since destruction of live standing trees is frowned upon, if not prohibited outright by local public opinion. In communities characterized by dispersed settlements, each family living on its own homestead in the middle of its own fields (as do the Mossi in Upper Volta, or the mixed-farming Bugaaje of Niger), individual owners more or less "protect" the trees on their land. Woodlot common properties thus do take very diverse shape in the Sahel, including everything from state to village to individual homestead units.

Public Choice Remedies

As the Ostroms have argued (1977 a: 160-61), when boundary lines of existing governmental jurisdictions coincide with boundaries of common property systems, such jurisdictions may offer frameworks for efficient management of resource systems when demand exceeds supply.

The question arises whether it is feasible to manage the commons—and indirectly, to produce the public good of environmental maintenance—by endowing local jurisdictions with relevant powers in this area.

It has been argued (V. Ostrom and E. Ostrom 1977 a: 160-61, 170-71) that efficient management of renewable common property resources depends upon satisfaction of the following conditions within appropriately-sized jurisdictions. Each must have,

- a) information-gathering capabilities necessary to establish current state of the resource, patterns of production and consumption, and likely consequences of differing management strategies (such information is often most appropriately gathered by disinterested third parties who have no direct stake either in production or consumption of the resource);
- b) taxing and/or pricing powers to communicate to individuals roughly the costs of their actions, thus encouraging optimal patterns of use; and
- c) enforcement powers to uphold regulations channeling behavior in ways which will promote optimum usage of the resource.

To what extent could these conditions be met under contemporary political regimes in the Sahel? To clarify implications of choices involved, assume Sahelian governments could vest in local regimes powers of the sort specified above, a)-c). Assume also that village jurisdictions are appropriately-sized units which correspond to the size of local common property woodstocks and pastures. (There are exceptions to this last assumption, i.e., state forestry preserves and interstate cattle passages facilitating livestock exports to Nigerian markets south of Niger, but these can be ignored for the moment because the local units, as will be seen shortly, pose more difficult management problems).

To highlight difficulties, it is appropriate to focus on the enforcement problem, and, as a corollary,, the issue of taxation or pricing. The information problem is probably less complex in these sorts of common pool problems, where one is not dealing with flow resources, but with fixed objects (trees, shrubs and grasses) whose values for certain purposes--fodder, fuel, crafts, food, medicine and fertilizer--are well known to local peasants and herders.

Any program of renewable common property resource management depends, finally, upon an effective system of law enforcement. Without it, neither property rights nor management regulations can be upheld, and management programs will collapse (Thomson 1977: 64-71). One must then consider whether effective enforcement can be had at reasonable cost in Sahelian rural regions.

Assuming villages are recognized as autonomous units for purposes of management programs, rather than as bottom-level administrative units, can one expect effective law enforcement? It is probably that, a century ago in many parts of the Sahel, both herding and farming communities were capable of

doing so. At that point, villages probably did constitute local communities in many parts of the Sahel, and local leadership was able to maintain a series of regulations within the group through local councils. Once the council membership reached agreement on a policy/ enforcement could be attained through reliance on extended family authority structures; where this was insufficient, social ostracism and related pressure mechanisms usually were equal to the task.

In the interim, village unity has seriously eroded in many parts of the Sahel. One can no longer reasonably rely on local enforcement procedures because many rural residents no longer accept the authority of local leaders as final (Thomson unpublished a; Thomson unpublished b). A judiciary which can resolve management disputes without undue enforcement costs to litigants appears indispensable. Does it now exist?

Frequently not. Most disputes in rural Sahelian areas are processed through administrative courts of various sorts, including, at the minimal level, village moots controlled by a strong village headman; district courts which still exist in many areas and are held either by traditional administrative officials (district chiefs) or their appointees (traditional Muslim clerics); independent, court-holding Muslim clerics who function more as arbiters than as authoritative dispute resolvers; and the subprefects, who control county-level administration and can, in many cases, effectively impose a decision. Beyond this level one finds justices of the peace, to whom administrative law cases are sometimes appealed and to whom lie appeals of private law disputes. Most of these instances, however, are located in regional towns, removed in terms of distance, time, authority and status, from the world of the rural Sahelian villager. It is highly doubtful that such courts would play a frequent role in resolving disputes related to resource management regulations. For practical purposes, under current conditions one has to expect disputes concerning unauthorized overcutting or overgrazing would be handled mainly at the district level, or not at all.

These district administrative/traditional courts (or comparable instances at the village level) may well fail to produce reasonably predictable and equitable outcomes. Of concern here is not the occasional flexible decision which bends the letter of the law on equity grounds to deal leniently with litigants hard-pressed by poverty. Instead, the possibility of

systematic manipulation of regulations must be considered- Some chiefs unquestionably take their responsibilities seriously and would consider it a requirement of benevolent paternalism, if not of noblesse oblige, to uphold rules which clearly benefit most residents of their jurisdictions in the long run. Others would be quick to see the advantage to themselves in such disputes of manipulating rules (for bribes, or to secure information about other local matters in return for leniency), and the management system would deteriorate. At some point, one would predict the retrogressive transformation of a managed commons into an unmanaged commons, within the context of which all have liberty to exploit the product, but none have rights through which they can prevent undue exploitation of the resource by others.

Without relatively fundamental modifications in the judicial and political systems of the Sahelian states, effective local management efforts appear improbable. Given the inadequate performance of existing bureaucratic forestry agencies, the prospects for successful environmental stabilization are bleak.

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